



CHAPTER 7

DRINKING, DRUGS, AND DRIVING

Drinking and driving

Alcohol is a drug that affects your overall driving ability. Alcohol slows your reaction time so that it takes you longer to act in an emergency. It affects your vision. Alcohol may make you overconfident and unable to think clearly. Drivers who drink may make more mistakes.

Even if you are below the level of legal intoxication, alcohol will affect your driving. Drinking even a small amount of alcohol increases your chances of having an accident. Do not drink and drive.

- In the United States, 2/3 of the adult population — or about 100 million Americans — drink, at least occasionally.
- Just as drinking is a fact of life, so are automobiles and driving. In New Jersey, about 5.8 million persons are licensed to drive. And, according to New Jersey Division of Addiction Services, attitudes about drinking and driving have changed. Only 21 percent of licensed drivers recently surveyed reported driving after drinking, compared with 37 percent in 1985.
- Between 1989 and 1998 there were 411,000 convictions for DUI in New Jersey. Currently, over 75 percent of those arrested for DUI are convicted.
- Of the 7,900 total traffic fatalities in New Jersey between 1989 and 1998, less than 34 percent were alcohol related. In this

period alcohol related traffic fatalities in New Jersey declined. Here are some statistics from 1995-1998:

Total fatalities	Year	Total alcohol-related traffic fatalities
748	1995	316
814	1996	280
787	1997	282
745	1998	271

How does drinking affect you?

Alcohol is not digested. It passes through your stomach and small intestine directly into the bloodstream and is carried to all parts of your body. Reaching your brain in small amounts, it promotes relaxation.

In larger amounts, it dulls the areas of your brain that control inhibition, judgment, and self-control. Losing these qualities, you may feel stimulated, lively, a bit giddy or foolish.

Drinking may increase confidence, but not performance. Alcohol can seldom make you do anything better, but it may make you care less about your mistakes.

After two to four drinks in a row, alcohol begins to impair your reaction time, coordination and balance. Your vision and ability to judge distance are affected, making it more difficult to react to dangers ahead or on either side.

Emotions affect your drinking style, and drinking, in turn, affects your emotions. When you're at ease, you may stop after the relaxing effect of one or two drinks. Angry, tense or under pressure, you may want to keep drinking to relieve these emotional stresses.

In heavier doses, alcohol can be a mood changing drug, producing sudden shifts in feeling all the way from elation to anger. Studies have proven conclusively that a combination of alcohol and anger is responsible for much of the reckless, aggressive driving that causes fatal highway crashes. Even though most alcohol involved crashes are single vehicle crashes, often other people are seriously injured or killed by drunk drivers. One of the best defenses against drunk drivers is the proper wearing of a seat belt, which is now required by law in New Jersey.

How much is too much?

How you feel while you are drinking, or the impressions others have of you, are not always reliable indicators of when you've had too much. Your ability to drive may be impaired long before you or anyone else notices outward, visible signs.

The only scientific way to check how much alcohol can affect you is by blood alcohol concentration (BAC). A simple breath test will show your BAC.

Expressed as a percentage of alcohol in your bloodstream, BAC is determined by four factors: quantity, body weight, time and amount of food eaten.

If you drink beyond a BAC of .05 percent — watch out. At slightly above .05 percent the risk of your causing a crash doubles. At .10 percent the risk is six times as great, and at .15 percent the risk is 25 times as great.

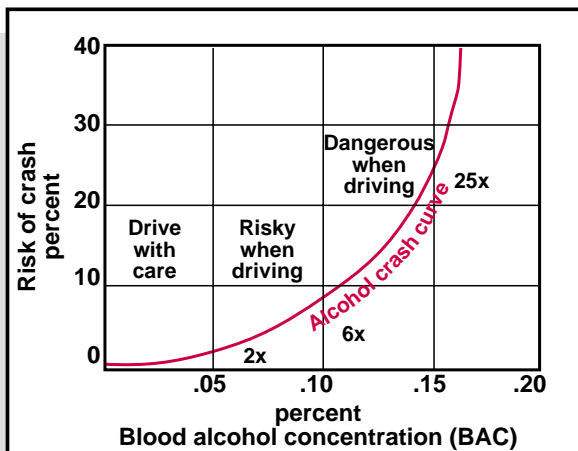
The message is clear: the only way to reduce the risk of a crash is by not drinking and driving.

Blood Alcohol Concentration (BAC).

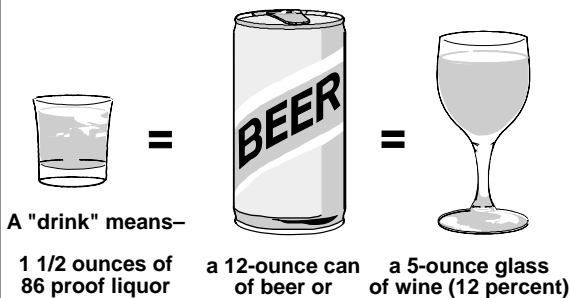
The percent of alcohol in a person's blood. In New Jersey it is illegal to drive when the blood alcohol concentration is .10 percent or more for a person 21 or over; .01 to .10 percent and .10 percent and above for someone under 21.

What should you drink?

What you drink doesn't really matter. There is just as much alcohol in the average drink of beer as there is in the average drink of whiskey or wine. For example, 1 1/2 oz (a jigger) of 86 proof whiskey, 5 ounces of table wine or 12 ounces of beer all contain the same amount of alcohol — about a 1/2 ounce of alcohol per drink.



It's not what you drink . . .
but how many drinks you have.



In fact, studies show the greatest number of people arrested for drunken driving had been drinking beer.

Mixing drinks doesn't make you drunk. Alcohol does.

Food does slow the absorption of alcohol. This delaying action prevents large amounts of alcohol from affecting your brain immediately. But, if you drink a lot, and steadily, eating won't prevent a high BAC.

And if alcohol is already in your bloodstream, eating won't sober you up. Neither will aspirin, black coffee, deep breathing, cold showers, a slap in the face or exercise. Only time will help in recovering from a high BAC.

How many drinks will raise your blood alcohol content above legal limits depends on your body weight and gender. If you are not feeling well or are tired or upset, even small or moderate amounts of alcohol may affect you more. The best advice is if you drink alcohol, do not drive. Even one drink of alcohol can affect your driving. With two or more drinks in your bloodstream you are impaired and could be arrested. There are ways to deal with social drinking situations. Arrange to go with two or more persons and agree which one will be the designated driver, use public transportation or call a cab.

You cannot hide drunk driving

Drinking affects your thinking. It also slows your reaction time. Alcohol may make you feel good. It may give you a false feeling that you can do anything. A trained policeman will notice a driver who has been drinking. Here are some telltale signs:

- Speeding** A drinking driver often thinks he or she can drive safely at high speeds.
- Weaving** Even though a driver may stay in the right lane, he or she may have trouble steering straight.
- Slow Driving** A drinking driver may be overly cautious and drive slower than the normal traffic flow.
- Jerking Motion** A drinking driver often may have short mental lapses and not keep a steady speed on a clear road.
- Quick Stops** A drinking driver may make sudden stops at a traffic sign or light, rather than easing up to it. This type of driving can cause accidents without the drinking driver being directly involved.

The good host and the drinking driver

When you are giving a party or having friends over, be a good host. If you serve alcoholic drinks, provide non-alcoholic beverages as well. Also serve nutritious foods or snacks along with the drinks. Don't insist that your guests drink alcoholic beverages or push refills. Stop serving alcohol well ahead of the departure of your guests. If someone drinks too much, do not let them drive. If



Laboratory and on-road research shows that the vast majority of drivers are significantly impaired with a blood alcohol concentration of .08 percent. They cannot perform critical driving tasks such as braking, steering and changing lanes.

no other transportation is available, suggest a nap or invite your guest to spend the night. As a last resort, you may have to notify the police. If a person gets drunk in your home and has an accident, you might be involved in a lawsuit.

Drugs and driving

Nobody knows how many accidents are caused by drugs. In a National Highway Safety Administration multi-state study of drivers killed in accidents, 18 percent had drugs other than alcohol in their bodies.

Most people think of drugs as narcotics, LSD, or marijuana. These drugs may affect basic driving skills. The use of more common drugs such as antihistamines, cold remedies, pain relievers and mood-changing drugs. Others are hashish, heroin, cocaine, morphine and amphetamines (pep pills). Using even small amounts of alcohol with other drugs is very dangerous. It is also illegal to operate a motor vehicle on New Jersey highways under the influence of drugs.

Read the label. The labels of most drugs will describe their effects. Any drug that “may cause drowsiness or dizziness” is not one you should take before driving. If you buy an over-the-counter drug, ask the druggist how it may affect driving.

Do not mix two drugs. Before mixing drugs, ask your doctor about possible side effects. (They can be the same as mixing drugs and alcohol.)

Check with a doctor. If you must use drugs, ask your doctor about their effects on driving.

As with alcohol, a person using drugs often does not know he cannot drive safely. Alcohol should never be taken with any other drugs or medications. Mixing any drugs or medications can greatly increase the effects of the drug or medication.

Here are some rules that anyone who drives should follow when using drugs:

- If you use drugs that require a doctor's prescription, and you do not have one, the drug is not legal.
- If you use drugs under a doctor's orders, you must show proof. Chapter 6 explains what the penalties are for using drugs and then driving or having drugs with you while driving.



Aggression and driving

New Jersey has waged a campaign against high risk drivers who take out their frustrations on others. Their acting out is commonly called "road rage," or motorists losing their tempers in reaction to a traffic disturbance. These aggressive drivers run stop signs and red lights, speed, tailgate, weave in and out of traffic, pass on the right, make improper and unsafe lane changes, make hand and facial gestures, scream, honk horns and flash their lights. In extreme cases they can cause accidents and kill.

Aggressive drivers usually react to their own moods when they get behind the wheels of their vehicles. Also, some are provoked by the actions of another driver; others are set off by roadway congestion. Regardless of the reasons, aggressive drivers are breaking the law. New Jersey's aggressive driver enforcement patrols are specially trained to observe aggressive driving-related activities and to issue summonses.

If you encounter an incident of road rage, protect yourself from an aggressive driver by getting out of his/her way. Do not challenge the driver. Avoid eye contact. Make sure your seat belt is properly fastened and passengers are buckled up. If you can safely do it, call the police at #77 (for cellular phones only) or (888) SAF-ROAD to report the violator.



Health and driving

Health

Any health problem can affect your driving. Even little problems like a stiff neck, a cough, or a sore leg can give you trouble while driving. If you are not feeling well, let someone else drive.

Vision

Vision is important to safe driving. Drivers may be called for an eyesight check every 10 years.

Most of what you do behind the wheel is based on what you see. Have your eyes tested every year or two. If you are over 40, have them checked every year

for special problems. To drive safely, you should have good side vision. Side vision helps you see out of the corners of your eyes while looking straight ahead.

Your distance judgment is also important in driving. You should know your distance from any object while driving. Bad distance judgment often causes accidents.

Hearing

Hearing is more important to driving than many people think. It can warn you of danger. The sound of horns, sirens or screeching tires warns you to be careful. You may be able to hear a car that you do not see. If you have a hearing problem, it helps if you install another rearview mirror on the right side of your vehicle.

Hearing problems, like bad eyesight, can come on so slowly that you do not notice them. Drivers who know they are deaf or have hearing problems can adjust. They can learn to rely more on their sight. Their driving records are just as good as those drivers with good hearing.

Even people with good hearing cannot hear well if the radio is blaring or they are wearing earphones. Keep the radio turned down and don't wear earphones while driving. When possible, open a window to hear more clearly.

Emotions

Emotions can have a great effect on your driving. You cannot drive well if you are worried, excited, afraid or angry.

If you are angry or excited, give yourself time to cool off. Take a short walk. Stay off the road until you are calm.

If you are worried about something, try to get it off your mind. Listen to the radio. Listening to someone else helps get your mind off problems.

If you are impatient, give yourself extra time. Leave early. That way you will not tend to speed or try to rush through traffic light changes. When you are in a hurry, you are more likely to get a traffic ticket or have a collision.

If you are with someone else who is upset, protect him and yourself. Delay, talk, stall, or take a walk. Do anything to keep the person from driving. If you cannot keep an upset person from driving, at least stay out of the car yourself.



Mature drivers

One out of four New Jersey residents is 55 years or older. This ratio is expected to increase in the coming years. Mobility by driving is essential for this group.

Normal physical changes are part of the aging process. Mature drivers may experience declines in vision, hearing, reaction time and flexibility. But, they can

continue to drive safely by learning to compensate for these changes by following these important tips.

- Choose the time and the road that's best suited to your driving ability.
- Choose a well-lighted roadway for night driving.
- Stay alert when driving to compensate for any declines in vision, hearing or reaction time.
- Keep information on public transportation, taxi services and senior ride programs current and on hand in case you need an alternative transportation mode.
- Share driving time with another person.
- Keep your driver license current.
- Enroll in a defensive driving or driving refresher course.
- Visit your ophthalmologist, optometrist or optician annually for a vision and eyeglasses check. If you experience vision problems, have your eyes checked immediately.
- Ask your doctor or your pharmacist if the medications you are taking can affect your driving.
- Never drive if you have taken any medications and consumed alcohol.
- Don't drink alcoholic beverages in any quantity and drive.
- Accept the judgment of your family and friends about your driving skills. Ask them to rate your skills, and improve or discontinue driving if your driving's unsafe.

Mature driver improvement program

As a mature driver you should constantly re-evaluate your driving skills. You may wish to enroll in a driver improvement course at a driving school or through an organization.

For example, The American Association of Retired Persons (AARP) offers **55 Alive**, a driver improvement course that's specially designed for motorists age 50 and older. The eight-hour course helps drivers refine existing skills and develop safe, defensive driving techniques. An added bonus is that in New Jersey the course may qualify drivers who successfully complete the course to a minimum five percent vehicle insurance discount.

To find out more about this course you can call AARP toll free at (888) 227-7669. Check with your insurance company about how completing the course will affect your premium.



Study questions for Part 3

1. What is an habitual offender?
2. If you lose your license for six months to one year for alcohol or drug related driving under the influence (DUI), you also may be imprisoned for up to 30 days, and be required to perform community service or be detained 12-48 hours at an Intoxicated Driver Resource Center (IDRC). What fines and fees do you have to pay if any?
3. Is it true that not telling the truth when applying for a license or registration will result in a fine of not less than \$200 or more than \$500 and/or up to six months imprisonment?
4. Can you ask another person to take the driver test for you? And, will anything happen if you do?
5. Does New Jersey issue conditional or work licenses to people who have lost their driver privileges?
6. How often does MVS allow you to take a defensive driving course that may reduce the points on your driver record?
7. Name moving violation convictions that add five points to your driver record.
8. If you commit a moving violation in another state, will it become part of your New Jersey driver record?
9. What is a BAC?
10. At what BAC level does your risk of causing a motor vehicle accident become 25 times greater?

Answers

1. A person with three license suspensions for violations that happened within three years, who may lose his/her license for up to three years.
2. \$250-\$400 fine; \$75 per day IDRC fee; \$100 drunk driving fund fee; \$100 Alcohol Education and Rehabilitation Fund fee; \$1,000 a year for 3 years surcharge; \$75 Safe Neighborhood Services Fund fee.
3. Yes.
4. No you cannot. If you have another person take the test for you, you may have to pay a fine of \$200 to \$500 maximum and may serve 30-90 days in prison. Your privilege to have a driver license can also be taken away.
5. No.
6. Once every five years.
7. Speeding 30 mph or more above legal limit; reckless driving; racing on highway; tailgating; passing a stopped school bus.
8. Yes, under the Interstate Compacts.
9. The blood alcohol content (BAC) is a scientific method to measure how much alcohol can affect you.
10. .15 percent.